

SERMON OF REV. MARK LAMPLEY

“Substituting Jobs”

January 21, 2018

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, ‘Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.’ So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, ‘Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

Jonah 3:1-5

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Mark 1:16-20

These four verses from Mark 1 are a call story, not unlike other OT call stories you may remember like: Moses who was called through the burning bush, Samuel with the Lord visiting during his dreams, Elisha who was called out of the fields, or the sometimes reluctant prophet Jonah called by God, more than once, before he did what he was told.

All of us have a common desire to follow Christ. Maybe the thirst for the desire comes and goes, but it’s there. We would also all agree it’s a great witness, the more faithful we are to the task. Sharing this in word and deed is also known as evangelism, of course. Everyone is in worship today because of this core belief in following Jesus Christ our Lord, our teacher. This text, though, is NOT first about human response to Jesus’ call, as much as it is about, when God comes to us, what He does & how he does it- revealing His loving and gracious character.

Interestingly, when Jesus begins his recruiting ministry, he doesn’t go to the synagogue where you’d expect to find deeply religious and pious people. Instead, he goes to the public workplace, where people make their living. He interrupts these anglers in the middle of their working. I would have thought our Lord would courteously wait until a convenient lunch or coffee break to bid them “Come.” No, he doesn’t even respect their tasks in their trade. Jesus interferes with them. In one sense, He comes across as a slick, successful headhunter who issues miraculously irresistible calls or invitations. What! No interviews with a total stranger that you want to have as your long-term student! This business model surely won’t fly!

These are family men who have children and wives to feed, households to support, so it doesn’t seem liked they’d flippantly follow. Realistically, their loved ones are not completely abandoned, but Mark here looks ahead to make potential disciples aware of the “cost to discipleship.” Geographically, when Jesus starts his itinerate ministry in Galilee, he makes Capernaum the base of

his operations. This area had the reputation of some of the best rabbi training schools, so rabbis would have likely flooded the market.

Part of Jesus' early work was to differentiate himself from any old rabbi. Remember how last week's sermon? As described in Mark chapter 2, Jesus notices the faith of 4 friends who tore a roof off his house in order to have their friend healed. He looked at the heart of a person and people. He sought out where faith was.

God has always been in the business of seeking out faith. Sarah Young, in Jesus Calling says, [paraphrasing] God's nature is finding and blessing; our nature is receiving and thanking. Here, God finds faith and develops it in Galilean men and women. God, in the form of Jesus: comes to us at our work, our school, meets us there, speaks to us in that environment (if we're listening), and blesses us as we go HIS way. God's action is noteworthy, life-changing and personal.

He comes to our humdrum, where normalcy is like fishing nets, or dirty laundry, paying bills, doing homework, or dealing with stacks of paper across an office desk. Emerges with invitations where life has degenerated in preoccupations with returning emails, texts & even discussions at committee mtgs. He comes to where hired hands work. In this context, God shows up, to utilize imperfect servants. He uses stinky, fish-smelling hands to change the world.

Let's not miss Jesus' counter-cultural job qualifications. In those days, to become a Rabbi's disciple you had to prove that you were worthy by memorizing the first 5 books of the OT- that's a chore!- and much of the Psalms and prophets. Rabbis typically interviewed candidates to figure out who was good enough to invest their time in. Many candidates would be turned down. Only the best of the best were invited to come & follow a particular Rabbi. Radically, Jesus did not follow this stringent rabbinical pattern.

Jesus is not seeking the cream of the crop. If these 4 fishermen, we just read about, were being recruited, then they were not already following a Rabbi, nor were they Varsity team material; more like JV or third string no-names. Obviously, Jesus doesn't think that we have to be the smartest, or meet a certain intellectual or moral standing, or have it all together, in order to begin to follow him and be his disciple.

Jesus thinks that ordinary people have what it takes, to learn from him, to know what he knows, to do what he does. It makes a whole lot more sense for me, knowing this, why the Pharisees / strict Bible teachers, were often so mad at Jesus. They complained about Jesus hanging out with the riff-raff, with the not-good-enoughs, with the nobodies. And in that sense, Jesus was giving their profession a bad name!

They saw him taking his great gifts and his amazing knowledge and wasting them by giving them to just anybody. Jesus was calling the least, and the last, and the lost. They thought he was recklessly wasteful and extravagantly generous. Even though religious leaders were upset with Jesus, he called anyone who would listen, inviting them, literally to walk after him. So, are we to understand the disciples substituted their fishing jobs for doing ministry-training full time? Is this text saying a: lawyer, doctor, banker, realtor, sales person, or folks in other fields have to switch vocations to be a faithful Jesus follower?

These pair of brothers- [Peter with Andrew, James with John]- were called from fishing to get a new focus in life, a temporary substitute profession, if you will. They were to have an emphasis of serving other people in love, on “fishing for men” fish for people. God’s heart and mind prove to have great concern for those: who are in need, who will accept the good news, who are wandering, who are hurting. Saving the lost may be God’s greatest concern. It is, therefore, ours, too!

Just like Moses and Samuel were to lead a lost nation, and Elisha & Jonah to invite people to repentance, these are efforts to sacrificially do for another. Similar to the OT characters, these NT disciples were to unselfishly serve this new Rabbi as He led them. The scriptures say, as Jesus passed along, he SAW Peter and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea. Our Sovereign God notices what we do, how we carry out our day.

The Psalmist prays a prayer I like to pray, “Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings. When Jesus approached them, his invitation was personal. It’s a personal touch which attracts us, is it not? He didn’t send a messenger, nor did he inscribe it on a beautiful parchment or handsome scroll. Cards and letters are nice and they’re meaningful, but they can only do so much. Noticing someone for their gifts... with a personal touch, that makes all the difference.

Be warned, though! Many, in this life, will entice us to come and follow, with a personal touch or smooth talk. even know of a snake that once talked real pretty led a nice couple astray. These days, leaders of all kind all around the world will seek our loyalty, but Proverbs 3 teaches us to, “Trust in the LORD with all our heart, lean not on our own understanding, but in all our ways acknowledge HIM and He will make our paths straight.”

For us, as for the early Biblical characters, the heart of discipleship lies simply in following Jesus. No doubt, we are **not** going to follow faithfully enough; that’s why Presbyterians regularly confess their sins and seek God’s mercy. Our failures don’t bar us from the kingdom, nor does our obedience earn us salvation.

We know from continuing to read throughout the gospels, the disciples quickly fail as new followers, but God never gives up graciously blessing them, even with excessive generosity and lots of second chances. Although these students of the Way sincerely wanted to be faithful, like when Peter declared he would die before he would abandon Jesus, God knew desire alone wouldn’t be the way to heaven. Jesus was and is the only way to span the gap and he, through the cross, did that! Our following-job is to receive this good news and submit to a life of daily choosing Him, attempting to do what he taught. This is our expression of thanksgiving. In the name of the Father, Son, Holy Ghost!

Prayer: God, may we do our part to point people to Jesus graciously, lovingly and personally. May our church ministries and the way we do our own secular jobs in the world foster a thirst for following Christ. Amen.

This transcript has not been read or edited by Rev. Mark Lampley.